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DCI

Meeting with Secretary Shultz

7 September 1984

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7 September 1984

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Generational Policy Perspectives Within the Soviet Leadership

The recent prolonged absence of 72-year-old General Secretary Konstantin Chernenko and the increased public prominence of younger leaders have focused the attention of Soviet officials and Western observers on the prospect that the top party post will pass to a younger successor. Although younger leaders--such as party secretaries Mikhail Gorbachev (53) and Grigoriy Romanov (61)--rose to power in the post-Stalin period under significantly different political circumstances than their elders, the impact these circumstances have had on their political orientation remains unclear. Moreover, the range of views among Soviet leaders of the same generation suggests that for mainstays of the regime--such as Defense Minister Dmitriy Ustinov and Foreign Minister Gromyko--the question of who succeeds Chernenko will be more important than how old he is. [redacted] 25X1

With their current influence in the Soviet leadership at a peak, Gromyko and Ustinov have personal stakes in maintaining the Politburo status quo. Although both owe much of their unprecedented current influence to the weakness of incumbent General Secretary Chernenko, they enjoy political positions that antedate Chernenko's tenure and that are likely--at least in the short term--to assure their continuing influence even if Chernenko is succeeded by a younger, more dynamic party chief. [redacted] 25X1

Gromyko, Ustinov, and Chernenko

[redacted] 25X1 when Yuriy Andropov died in February, Gromyko and Ustinov supported Chernenko, whom they reportedly had opposed in the past, as Andropov's successor. They apparently opted for a leader whose relative weakness would guarantee their strong influence in the defense and foreign policy spheres rather than risk the uncertainties that a younger leader would bring to the Politburo equation. In light of Chernenko's apparent ill health, however, the Politburo may once again be faced with choosing a new General Secretary and the prospect of a possible younger successor. [redacted] 25X1

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The Next Succession

It is not clear which leader Ustinov or Gromyko would support this time around. Although the two are alike in some obvious ways--both are 75 and have powerful positions with national security responsibilities--they also are significantly different and independent political figures and are not known to be personally close. Gromyko has spent his entire career in the Foreign Ministry and focuses almost solely on foreign policy matters. Ustinov has a much broader background, and his current responsibilities require the integration of the economic and political aspects of defense questions--resource allocation, research and development, armaments programming and foreign policy considerations--with strategic doctrine. Because of these differences, their views on policy issues do not necessarily coincide, and their perceptions of contenders for Chernenko's post--such as party secretaries Gorbachev and Romanov--may be quite different. [redacted] 25X1

Gromyko and Ustinov: Political Prospects

If Ustinov and Gromyko remain healthy, neither Gorbachev nor Romanov seems likely to pose a threat to their political positions in the near term. Although either probably would be more ambitious and formidable than Chernenko, neither would have the power at the outset to challenge a colleague of Ustinov's or Gromyko's stature. Moreover, Gorbachev or Romanov would be coming into office with even less experience in foreign policy than Chernenko had. Although the successor might inherit the trappings of power rather quickly, his influence in foreign policy and national security matters would be limited by the continued presence of the experts--Ustinov and Gromyko. [redacted] 25X1

If either Gorbachev or Romanov wins out, however, his youth and apparent good health should at least give him sufficient time to consolidate his position and the stamina to wear down--or outlive--the opposition. Others in the leadership, moreover, would likely realize that their long-term political prospects would be better served by forming an alliance with the new General Secretary, a factor that would gradually undercut the influence of the Politburo elders. [redacted] 25X1

Gromyko, Ustinov, and Gorbachev

Of the current contenders for Chernenko's post, Gorbachev appears to have a clear lead. He is being openly touted by some

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Soviet officials as the next General Secretary. protocol treatment of him moreover, indicate that he was "in charge" in Moscow during Chernenko's recent vacation and suggest that a Politburo decision was made to accord him such prominence.

Gorbachev's policy views may not be particularly palatable to Gromyko. On US-Soviet relations, Gorbachev's rhetoric has been far less strident than Gromyko's, and since the breakdown of the INF talks he has continued to express hope that some progress can be made in other areas. As agriculture secretary, he has shown a strong interest in acquiring US agro-industrial technology, and this consideration may be a factor in tempering his views on US-Soviet relations. Gorbachev might not be chosen because he is "too pro-American" suggests that Gorbachev's views are widely perceived as significantly different from those of Gromyko, reputedly the most "anti-American" Soviet leader.

In contrast to his apparent differences with Gromyko, Gorbachev has a record of concern with economic issues that is like Ustinov's. Gorbachev, unlike previous agriculture secretaries has not been a lobbyist for narrow agricultural interests, but has taken a broader view. He has favored a shift of resources away from direct investment in agriculture to the development of the rural infrastructure (housing, storage, transportation), and he recently described the priority development of heavy industry as a "prerequisite for the solution of all economic and social tasks." Similarly, Ustinov has on several occasions passed up opportunities to push publicly for additional resources for defense, noting instead the importance of building a stronger economy that will, in turn, lead to a stronger defense capability.

Gorbachev may also have initiated the Politburo's decision earlier this year to withhold the bulk of the military transport usually provided for the harvest--a move that probably was designed to make the agricultural sector more self-reliant but that may also have increased his standing with Ustinov. Gorbachev was unusually demonstrative in welcoming Ustinov back from his trip to Czechoslovakia last month, leaving the impression that personal relations between the two are good.

Gromyko, Ustinov, and Romanov

Like Gorbachev, party secretary Grigoriy Romanov has become increasingly prominent in recent months, attending functions that confirmed his responsibility for defense industry and security

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organs. Although Romanov's prospects have been played down , he is the only contender other than Gorbachev who holds dual membership in the Politburo and Secretariat--a key to victory in past succession struggles.

Romanov's views on US-Soviet relations appear to be closer to Gromyko's than Gorbachev's have been. Both Gromyko and Romanov have been described as "lacking flexibility" in that area. The difference between Gorbachev and Romanov was illustrated in speeches that both delivered last winter. Although both leaders were critical of the United States, Gorbachev balanced his portrayal of the sense of threat with several protestations that the Soviet Union would have liked to avoid a breakdown of the arms talks and asserted that Soviet deployment of additional missiles in Eastern Europe was not irreversible.

Some circumstantial evidence suggests that Romanov advanced to his current position with the acquiescence, if not the backing, of Ustinov. As secretary for defense industry from 1965 to 1976, Ustinov probably had frequent contact with Romanov, who headed the party organization in Leningrad, an important arms production center. It also seems likely that Ustinov approved Romanov's being entrusted with his current responsibility as party secretary for defense industry. Neither Ustinov nor Gromyko, however, has been reported to be a solid ally of Romanov's, and both may share a wariness about his independence, overweening ambition, and strong-willed style.

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